Sola Poēta

Issue I

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Silver Starling Press
LEAMINGTON

Sola Poēta
ISSN 2371-6940
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Published by Silver Starling Press, Leamington, Ontario
Email: silverstarlingpress@gmail.com
Publisher Website: https://silverstarlingpress.wixsite.com/home
Magazine site: https://silverstarlingpress.wixsite.com/home/solapoeta

Editor: Andreas Gripp
Proofreader: Carrie Lee Connel

Front Cover & Preface Page Photos: Andreas Gripp
Back Cover Collage: Carrie Lee Connel

Text font for poetry is Sylfaen 12pt.

Publication Date: February 2025

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MOLDAVIA

Scar Tissue

That ridge down your right leg. It's nothing but scar tissue.
A deep cut once maybe. An operation. A fall.
The body wasn't designed to be perfect, just functional.
Don't try to hide it. That never works.
Just brandish it like a war wound.
Not all personal history wavers between
the embarrassing and the downright dull.
There are moments when you take a hit,
when the normal is under attack,
when blood spills. If life was a book,
then each bloody wound would be a chapter heading.
That's when the healing conies in.
The flesh needs to put up some pretense
that nothing happened. But then it pins a medal
on you anyhow. A line of raised skin.
Run your fingers along it. How many moments
of pain in your life can you touch without wincing?
The rest of you is waiting to hear.

Mark and Clara

From their hillside home,
Mark and Clara sit in cane-back chairs,
in late afternoon sun,
out on a patio
that looks over a small cat cemetery.

The air's not moving.
The distance is crowded with downtown.
And, beyond that,
highways to the sun.

Mosquitoes buzz in
from a nearby stagnant pool.
Some kids are setting off fireworks.

The house, the location,
was once a dream.
Twenty years ago,
it stopped coming true.

And before all the surrounding lots sold,
before the city grew,
before the house was abandoned,
the cats were alive and free-roaming.

Some caught a disease.
Some were hit by cars.
Mark and Clara
are the last of them.

Whiskey

It glows golden in the glass,
a long way from when it was no more
than fermented grain mash.
The guy who ordered it
hasn't even taken a sip yet.
He's admiring the holy spirit
like it's a jewel in a store window.
The alcohol's been distilled
and aged and bottled.
And now poured.
And the guy's been distilled himself,
and aged plenty,
and bottled in a sixty-year-old body.
And he's poured himself
into a stool up at the bar.
So it's a convergence of equals.
And the drinking
hasn't even started yet.

Copper Penny

If it were juice, a light cranberry tinged with grape.
If wine, a sauterne, a bubbling rosé. If essential oil
neroli, the taste of tangerine. If scent, what the wind
carries from May blossoms, hawthorn and lilac, lily-
of-the-valley intermingled, a confusion of delight
ripe and ready to turn from cinnamon to ash-grey.
A vibration beyond ultra-violet, where illusions of
colour shape ginger to rainbow glints among fading
memories, strawberry blonde aging well to white.
My grade seven teacher, Miss Morgan, told me
years later that she would sit me in the window
aisle so she could enjoy sun shining on my hair.
How senses interpret synaesthesia as taste or scent—
auburn, chestnut, carrot, scarlet, flame. Hey, Red!
Gobbling up youth, inhaling seven decades past.

The Race

We've finished Phys. Ed. class, running
with the fast boys along a cinder track
behind our school, stalling for time over
undone sneakers, changing out of awful
red and white bloomers in school colours,
the new stink of sweat still with us as we
while away a Grade Nine June afternoon
on the slope. Circle skirts we'd hemmed
only this morning, spread over the green.
We're giggling at the word nipple pleated
by stray finger nipped. *Peyton Place*, page
folded down to mark all proper passages
improperly fingered. Black dots cheek
flush, the impulse to sink into the hill
or run into the beechwood, to become
dryad, Daphne. Would it not be safer
than that subtler urge to chase the other,
he whose strong arm muscle entices?

Black marks on a page elicit blush and
flush the errant flicker pulsing down
where the body forks, as yet unknown
country. The skirt, huge purple flowers
on white ground, encircling pattern to
promise arms' embrace, summer and
Grade Ten sock hops, *Magic Moments*
played over and over, then *Breaking Up*
Is Hard to Do, undone, unzipped, unseen.
We gyrate to The Twist, learnt by rolling
bath towels behind our backs, suddenly alert
to new dance, this competitive sport among
those we thought were best friends forever.
Cross your heart and hope. While holding
your skirt hem up, slap your knee and toss.

New Year's, 2025

Snow drops vertically so thick
it instantly lines bare branches,
white on white birch. Voices
of our beloved dead covering
the recently green lawn with
no word but presence. Sound
smothered in snowfall stops.
Only Beethoven on the radio
is not mute, is crescendo after
crescendo, rising or raging
against silence as Mother Hel
shakes feather pillows from sleep.
Snow now drifts with the chords.
Simon Rattle conducts the Fifth.

Mother Hawk

I hear the starlings outside my window.
They're talking about me—though I don't
speak their language. Virginia Woolf claimed
they speak Greek. I disagree. Their lyricism
suggests a romantic tongue, French, maybe Italian?
Their tweets call out, chirps echo back,
before devolving into manic laughter.

With beady eyes, they peek into my second-story
bedroom, mocking my apron belly, uneven breasts,
before retreating to the neighbor's hedges
to plan their next move in this game
of psychological warfare.

A mother dove perches in the robin's old nest
atop the downspout. She can stay.
She is quiet, a newcomer.
I burn the rice again, distracted by my thinking—
my own ambient noise. These days,
I ask too many questions with too many answers.
It's all too much, too much for a weeknight dinner,
too much for a Tuesday, too many days left in the week,
too many dinners left to make, too much for this poem.
The starlings probably love the smell of smoke—
proof their earlier missile stuck true.
I'm aflame with self-contempt.

I should cackle back one day
or hurl my children's diapers
at their nest, retaliate
for every shit grenade
they launch into our pool.

I used to talk to the birds
before I grew up,
before I became a mother—
before they mocked me from the hedges…

I stood barefoot where tame lawn met wild forest,
traced the edge of shadow.
I whistled high and low in answer
to a Chickadee's lonesome call,
hooted with the unseen Barred Owl,
kee-keed alongside the mother Cooper's Hawk.

She was a fierce matriarch. She taught her babies
to hunt, using my cat as a decoy. Each new clutch
practiced their art on him—a beating heart
for their predatory circle.
They never caught him, by her design—
most likely.

Once, that cat disappeared for six long months.
His prodigal return transformed him
into an indoor cat— for his own good.

He lived for 17 years, made sure I grew up.
The Cooper's Hawks left after that.

I guess that's motherhood.

We sling our children's shit from nest to pool,
diaper to garbage pail. Burn dinners, form
hunting circles, go to war with the birds.
Maybe I should learn Italian,
parley with the birds again,
get answers to my weeknight questions—
how to cook rice, keep up with inflation,
answer my son's questions about God,
shed this default-parent mental load.
Or maybe I'll get a cat and entice the hawks back.

The Blue Hour

"…the period of twilight (in the morning or evening, around the nautical stage) when the Sun is at a significant depth below the horizon. During this time, the remaining sunlight takes on a mostly blue shade."

—Wikipedia

On autopilot, leaning into the curves
in the road where night and day have
yet to collide. In the west the moon is
transfixed by the promise that the sun
will rise and carry the burden of light
but for now, the bare fields lie open
injured months ago by harvest.
Out of the fog rises the question of
whether she regarded the speed limit
of the sign her flowers are tied to.
Vivid pinks and yellows wrapped
in cellophane like something you
suddenly remember. In this hour
the road is long, pulsing in broken
lines like a code repeating her message
that lasts until the blooms fade and
the rooster pours back his colour
into a dawn that is finally hers.

Early morning, standing in Lake Huron

No one wants to break a mirror.
Lake and sky meet somewhere
in the distance. A thin line,
a sentence.

We are planted in the sandy bottom:
earth water air
three ways of being
even if the wind has forgotten how to be.

The surface is only a moment
not a place.
If we move, our reflections wrinkle
the water ages, remembers
its own skin against yours.

Here, a boundary is not visible only
a sky flush with the silver line of water
and stillness like all the unspoken
words left at the horizon.

A Catalogue of Bird Poems

There's a cardinal in the maple outside,
a spot of scarlet and black against
the bright green of new leaves.
When someone asks
if you could be an animal,
which would you choose?
I always respond with *bird*, naming
a desire to fly above human trivialities,
escape the mundanity of every day,
become a swooping acrobat
that rests on air currents.
This is not about birds.

I imagine a day when I'm an invalid
and I command-beg my carers
to escort me outside to an evening
of setting sun and fragrances of
jasmine and gardenia,
reminiscent of a candle you once gave me.
I hope it will be my last day on earth
and my final breath leaves my body
as a murmuration of starlings wheels in the sky.
This is not about death.

The susurration of bird wings
may remind me of this cicada summer,

when multitudes of red-eyed creatures
leave their adobe-nests,
contract their tymbal muscles
bending ridged membranes on the back,
in a rapid chorus of buzzing clicks,
a sound I hate, but one you love.
This is not about insects.

I now wonder if there is
an online catalogue of bird poems
to look up what someone else said
about the crimson messenger
from beyond, as mother told me
it's a loved one come to visit.
We argue the existence of souls and spirits,
but not winged angels or horned demons
as neither of us believes.
We each cite facts to carry our points
and conclude *it's all in the head, either way*.
This is not about metaphysics.

The first time I saw a hummingbird,
I sat outside a New Brunswick café.
It may have been one of the few
joyful moments of that first marriage.
I thought initially it was a large beetle

but it flitted about soundlessly, and I knew.
It then stayed suspended in the air
and poked its beak into a petunia trumpet,
the scent overpowering even from where I sat.
The sun glinted off blue-green feathers
and warmed my fair skin.
The person I was with is absent from this memory.
This is not about trauma.

Seagulls flock in the parking lot at the mall.
We ask, *why here in the city when the lake*
is only forty-five minutes away by car?
We dream of living lakeside again.
The gulls survive on discarded food waste
heaped beside garbage cans.
There are a few grocery carts scattered about,
one filled with the meagre possessions
of a person sleeping under the eave.
We ask, *why here in the suburbs when the missions*
are located only a few miles away in the core?
This is not about want.

I'm certain I've never seen a white dove in person,
except in a magician's sleight of hand,
produced from a billow of silk handkerchiefs.
But when I hear the coo of mourning doves
seeking seed beneath the other birds,
I think of that funeral procession in '97,

boys following the casket of their beloved mother,
an afternoon full of grief.
I contemplate my own losses,
regret the fading of memory as time passes.
This is not about peace.

We were called that moniker again last night:
The Love-Bird Poets,
and we heard the chuckles and sounds of 'aw'.
If I hadn't been someone else's wife when we first met,
perhaps our mate-for-life time could have
stretched to a diamond anniversary.
Despite our aging bodies, we will
take the time allotted to us
to live in our dovecote abode
and share our versified dreams.
This is, and always has been, about love.

Elmore James Outfoxes Old Scratch (1955)

That December night the hawk cut
To the bone. Elmore was mad as hell.

Damned television. I
Play the blues for my own.

Salt seeped into his mouth's coarse grain.
How does skin contain so much?

Elmore's fingering a real bottleneck,
Browngglass lip broken. He slicks the griefs that bedevil him.

Old Scratch's a fox, a trickster.

He tastes the iron blood on tongue.
I'll taunt Scratch.

Believe I'll dust my broom.

This the wolfish hour. Everybody's abed 'cept
Hoodoo ghosts. Elmore slides the high strings, his life

Hanging on it. He sees the future and rips it up.
I believe my time ain't long.

Hell's a place where not a damned thing changes.

A Dream Deferred

His face has a bluish sheen
The sag of rotting plums

Eyes wine-colored from
Epochs of bloodnights

Fog of winter sun. Ropy
Sinew anointed with sweat.

He does not recall
The long-ago image:

Yoruban warriors and gods
Not paving stone but ancient, dusky rivers

Except wandering Harlem
Streets at chronic dawn and conjures

A dream deferred
And it is much too late.

Wax Simulacra

god was making ice cream
directly in our mouths
we all had cities in our mouths
god stirred rock salt
eggs, heavy cream in the streets
motor oil on vanilla
we were watching Joker 2
I fell asleep and felt guilty about it
we left before the courthouse blew up
and we found out the punchline was us
I lost sight of you
a woman with a buzz cut approached me
said she was your friend
said there was a secret room
in the Texas Theatre
where you could smoke called
the goblin room
god was making ice cream
directly in our mouths
the cities were lonely places
the buildings reached up to other buildings
some animals had to die in between
their shadows are always mistaken for empty suitcases
the ice cream had an aftertaste like banana
like no banana we have anymore

we were watching Megalopolis
you were asking me kindly not to laugh
I stepped out—only for a bit, to check on the stars

The Haymaker

Every poet I adore
has written one-too-many
books. Filled with poems
which are insipid,
absent of spark &
fire, the fatigue
of wearied tropes,

as if the author
wouldn't humbly
hang 'em up, the *grail* of
one more shot,
an elusive Griffin win;

a fighter unable to
ponder a towel's *toss,*
his boxing gloves a smear
of double red—more *his*
than his opponent's,
staggering to his corner
after felled by a sudden
hook, like a bull
by a matador, stabbed—

avoiding the *told-you-so*
look from his trainer,

who pleaded he retire
while he could,
still *perched* upon a pillar,
yielding to temptation
for another day of
pay, couldn't resist the
lure

of a final taste of
glory, sprawled upon his
back upon the canvas, staring
at the ceiling like it's
sky, like a bard awaiting birds
that wouldn't show,
some coup-de-grâce
no longer in his reach.

The Reason I'm Too Cheap to Buy Your Art

The wall that is bare
in our bedroom
is a painting all its
own.

Someone made the *effort*
to submerge their brush in
Behr, smooth out every
stroke, proclaim *beige*
was a matter of
choice, out of every single
colour in the spectrum,

foreseeing that we'd be
wowed, by this minimal
masterpiece, discard our Andy
Warhol to the Value Village
bag, moan that we are sick
of Campbell's soup,
that it was just
another knock-off
someone scrapped on
garbage day.

I look for their initials
in the corner, say it's hidden

by our dresser, the one on which
I lay a pair of socks,
say it's just as good as Shulman,
boast I save the planet—
eschewing carbon shipping
from Czech Republic.

And as for your friend
at the market, the one I feign
I never see,
who hawks her sketches
from a stall, I'll explain
that we are tapped,
that everything is worked
into our rent,

that one *day*
we'll have her over,
and the three of us
will stand beside the
blinds, putting her to
shame, inhale the
tour de force
we've been bestowed.

The Second Moon

You may have
heard the Earth
got a 2nd moon,
33 feet in width,
for almost 60 days.

What you probably
didn't know
was the blandness
of its name: 2024
PT5—not exactly *Luna*
in the night.

None of us
should blame it
for not wanting
to stick around, circle
the planet
in disgust, watching the
horrid events
this past
November:

the shelling of
tents & children,
the wrath of

Hurricane Helene,
the men in charge
who said that nothing's
wrong—it's simply just
the weather's
temperamental;

and an oligarch's
second coming, saying
he's the light of the world,
building up the
borders
that from space
cannot be seen.

Or maybe it's
merely
no one
wrote a poem
about its face,
proposed beneath
its shadow
to a belovèd,
had a schoolyard
reverie,

of stepping
on its surface,
like some kid
might
someday hence,

amid the
bouncing
bop
of humankind,
planting a starry
flag
forever frozen
in its wave, shooting
off its mouth
it's here to stay.

Calendars

When I ask how long
we've had the
colander, you respond it's
relatively new.
But I should have
grilled of dates,
not the straining
of water from starch.

The heater in the
bedroom
by the drapes?
Relatively safe
you say, the odds of a
fire starting—relatively
low you add,
as if that brings me
comfort, falling short
of the certainty
of *never.*

You know me
all too well, somehow sense
what I'm bound to
query,

as if a traveller
through the ins and
outs of time.

We talk of Einstein's
theory, say *Relativity's*
not related
to the odds;
has nothing to do with
nearly, or some phantom
paradox,

and the fact that I despise
my nearby uncle
and his kin?
Relatives are surely
overrated, blood
is thinner than wine,
and the speed of light
will drop you
nowhere fast—

Aunt Petunia's
birthday party,
the one that's still to come
in 20 years,

when the guests
will see your visage,
assume that you've been
slathered in Olay, beg
to know your *secret*
to staying young,
that you'll keenly
keep us guessing
till the dawn.

Prayer in Time of Flood

Torrent, why do you
come uninvited
to my doorstep,

swallowing
my wooden porch,
rocking chairs and all?

Buffoon, why roll down
my street in oceanic
waves like a crazed

jester? I have fled
with my dog and laptop
full of verse.

Firefighters arrive
in a boat, row me
to higher ground.

I thank them, sit
and wait for the waters
to ebb, for the mud

and stench that follows.
I don the boots I bought
for the occasion. Mildew

gives a long and terrible
party to welcome toxic mold
and my own saturated prayers.

Photo on Ice

I pose on a glacier
somewhere in Norway
between Bergen and Oslo.

We had taken the “Troll Train,”
which played Grieg tunes
for tourists, chugging uphill

over the deep lake
bisecting snowy peaks.
We disembarked, cameras ready.

I turned twenty-eight that day,
delighted with the novelty
of ice in July.

My hair sifts a snowy white
today, when even midwinter
longs for the diamond sheen

of lost ice.

Poplar

After *The Large Poplar II (Gathering Storm)*
by Gustav Klimt

For Calypso on her enchanted isle,
it's one of three resurrection trees;
for fearsome Hades, a mortal love
transmuted to a rustling Elysian Fields revenant;
for beautiful, mysterious Persephone,
a herald of springtime and precious
months of release from Hades' dark realm.

But here is found a simpler setting:
familiar pastorality clinging to precarious
peace as a treacherous twilight steals in,
vanguard for a gathering storm.
Here too, Olympian mythos
transfigures to a modest chapel that
humbly kneels yet still emanates a
glorious poplar soaring heavenward,
iridescent bejewelled foliage now
dimmed by threatening gloom,
a towering wall of roiled slate
mobilized to strike as fragile majesty
braces for oncoming onslaught,
hope fixed on a frail glimmer
low on the horizon.

Avian Allegories—Blue Jay

First impressions:
    Loud and raucous screeches
    announce a bully on scene;
    blast into the feeder
    routing timid souls;
    bold, aggressive, bossy, simplistic.

But sit—
watch and listen in
quieter, more private moments,
peel back a layer or two,
find a different spirit:
    Keen intelligence devoted to family;
    need for puffery assuaged by
        imitations of a hawk;
    beauty in little musical motifs;
    tenderness in your whisper song.

A testament to misleading surfaces.

Avian Allegories—Crows

While Vincent pictured you patrolling a
wheatfield's path to a menacing storm,
here, when seen, your iridescent black
looms high in the oaks,
call like a hoarse thunderclap,
keen, lurking intelligence, always adapting,
always watching lesser beings below,
always vigilant for something
you deem out of place,
always ready to form a
homicidal Hitchcockian mob
to drive out any larger, nobler
wingèd spirit hunting for sustenance;
your domain is for corvid rationality.

Landscape

Okay, first we move the stream
to its original bed, then we restore
the vastness of this embittered landscape,
walk down asbestos-paved paths along

grassy meadows, pools full of toads,
crows in trees, a hill somewhere, a
serrated edge of spruce, scarce resource,
a canal, rustling roads, railroads, trees

like church towers, barns duck for
cover, grey fields as far as the eye can
see, drizzle and mist, we lay ourselves
down and reach for bread and water.

Sand

Where I came from, sprawling
roots in a world without rocks,
concrete bunkers in the dunes
and dependent for our survival

on the sea that brings fish for food
and everything, washed up stuff, sand
for under our feet, schools, sheds full
of shells. Nothing grows in the sand,

the houses have no gardens, trucks
bring tiles early in the morning from
somewhere, no idea, to tile over the sand.

Evening falls over beach and sea.
Hear the tapping of the rubber hammers
on the tiles in the sand on which we build.

A Woodland Walk In Late October

Close of October, 2024

Nearly Hallowe'en. Autumn's equinox
has been gone for over a month
yet summer clings like a drowning
swimmer to her ever-shortening days.
Many trees still hold their green
even if our black cherries and poplars
stand naked. This season the ghost
of Andrew Jackson haunts the
Carolinian forest, stalks the old
Confederacy seeking a resurrection,
a late return to the halls of power.

I watch the river carry its ships
down to the sea. As days slip past,
mated mallards speak their love
on the current, and I wonder
how long fear and recrimination
can prevail. Shagbark hickories
stand tall amid the lesser trees.
Staghorn sumacs, always early to go,
inflame both sides of my road.
The election draws near, and old
folks have seen it all before:

the waxing of November's moon,
spirit shadows in the woodlot,
morning mist on the face of the water
following an unexpected night of frost.
What, then, can be said of a choice
between lesser and more profound
evils, one poisoned rose or another?
As our waning world drifts towards winter,
while unseasonable warmth might linger,
I expect the vivid leaves of October
will fall by election day.

Pruning Shears

Sudden rain cleanses the ginkgo;
its yellow fans spread a carpet
for black squirrels and dog-walkers
and screaming children freed from school.
Almost November. We cannot
have many more days this mellow.

Much like death, winter will strike.
This morning opened dense with mist
exhaled by sodden fields besieged
by night's near frost: a grey blanket,
like an aging mind engulfed
by a confusion of memories.

By ten o'clock the air had cleared,
sunlight illuminating our
blazing maples, our russet oaks,
underfoot leaves still moist, yielding
to my tread. Another year's death
and resurrection awaits.

In orchards scouting the lake
trees are pruned, withered limbs lopped off
where confusion betrayed new growth.
Like our farmers, we pray next year
will be lush, life's yield richer,
despite our season's darkening days.

Southwestern Ontario

During summer's long afternoons
the windows of workers' homes
turn inward and cannot find
what they are seeking.
In my garden, a Japanese maple
offers its red prayers to the sky.

Eight o'clock comes at last! I notice
the widows have carried
their twilight down to the harbour.
Beyond the freight yards
the moss on farmstead cisterns
embraces late August's constellations,
the waning moon.

Our crickets open the door
to a strange stillness;
they must be awaiting a traveller.
Distant flame towers of chemical plants
are the only things to speak
to our crumbling darkness
tonight.

Toronto mon amour

(Insert small town name) is the girl you knew since kindergarten.

The one they all expected you to marry.

The one you abandoned at the altar for a woman named Toronto.

Who is Toronto?

Toronto's hair is dyed black and she keeps interrupting you
to go out for a smoke.

The words tattooed on her forearms are in no known language but say things like "kombucha" in a way that reads like birdsong.

Her ex-boyfriend is a web designer.

Her ex-girlfriend left her for a mommy blogger in Etobicoke.

When she comes home from a night out with her friends
her breath tastes like the smell of a restaurant stairwell leading to the washroom.

You won her over by sharing her fandom for obscure 90s
emo bands.

Every time you break up it's in front of a noodle house.

On weekends she lies in her white track pants on your white duvet in your white bedroom in your white condo eating your leftover pad thai on your white plates licked over by her white bichon frisé.

There's nothing in her fridge except a leftover wheatgrass smoothie and a flyer for an outlet mall in Burlington.

She has given up on giving up drinking even though this plays hell with her antidepressants.

She's not sure if she can do another winter.

She gets her best sleep in traffic.

She wears smog like a cocktail dress at breakfast.

And she wants to apologize for being moody.

Something something Mercury in retrograde.

Something *Cosmo*.

Anyway, she has to go.

No, she really has to go.

She means that, OK?

OK?

KTHXBAI

Dangerous Situations

In high school Jeff and I played a game called Dangerous Situations.

He'd say, You're barefoot on a balcony and suddenly it's a skillet!

To which I'd respond, The Iqaluit branch of Dada kidnaps you and plops you on an ice floe!

We'd outdo each other with every scenario.

Jeff: At an office party someone brings an aqualung of CO1!

Me: Your limbs are slick with apple sauce and you're in a pen of underfed sows!

And so on.

You dehydrate from being trapped on an island with nothing to consume but coconuts!

A toothless babcia curses you to eternal constipation!

Cops bash your door in at 3 a.m.!

Depression squeezes you like an ivy choking a tree!

A history of concussions turns your skull into a dandelion puff some toddler blows off its stem!

You run through the woods at night and approach the border with no documents, only books; once you ford the river and cross the plain you will finally stop running, for you will find a city and rely on the kindness of people you will never meet; the future will be everywhere like the scent of mown grass and grilling meat; and when you wake up in your cell this is the dream you will cling to like you once clung to your books, which you no longer need because like hope you know them by heart!

You're buried to your neck near an anthill with your head covered in honey!

You unroll your sleeping bag on the sidewalk!

Your pronouns are rejected!

Your eyes spring open wide as the day to be dazzled by light and vague shapes; you are alive; you are conscious; and you are upside down as you take the first of your 600 million breaths because the first person you ever meet is the first person to hurt you!

Commissioned Poem

This is the birth of something big, of a continent becoming countries, of barbed wire squeezing a vague idea, midnight passage, of muleback and blistered foot and windblown dust in open wounds, of the ashes of garment factories, of the sleeping bag on the steps of city hall, of economies of scale, which are the mark of the end times, of the roof torn off in the storm, of machines that have no sense of humour, of career paths no human should follow, of zero sympathy for plastic whales, of a profane geometry, of panic at the daycare, which is the mark of the end times, of servitude on cruise ships, of passing over that about which we can speak, of clothes your body must be made to fit, of seeing the back of your head when you look in the mirror, of investing heavily in collateral damage, of the first bear to die of heat stroke, of the last drop of honey, which is the mark of the end times, of what comes after popular music, of world-famous teenagers, of the paranoia that attends limitless options, of sex with machines that have no sense of humour, which is the mark of the end times, of no more spice smells in the hallway, of having no time to pack in the icy dawn, just running until your lungs give out, of the pharmaceutical apocalypse, of the oil-powered whatever, of the mother tongue you no longer speak, of the expensive baked potato, of what comes after postmodernism, of the dropped hourglass, of practice without theory, of shouting and shouting into a canyon and thinking the echo to be someone else, which is the mark of the end times.

The Ace of Knaves

I may be the image
of a moonscape Jacob
heartily guffawing, and
shan't foster resentment
regarding your twisted,
villainous grin.
Only dusty vagabonds
and wine-bibbing carousers
cry for the fallen spirits;
I will sing dirges donned in
mourning apparel, but
for you exclusively, that
Image of Jacob heartily
guffawing waxes on.

Anthem

The seaside cry rises and falls
against the jutting jagged rocks.
Supernatural sycamores summon
a heavy cloud stage production
in a sun colour-washed Valhalla.
Songbirds raise their voices from
tree limbs within a twisting wind.

The quick-witted woman remains
something of what happened when
the world still spun its luscious love
below a sun whose shafts darted
down to endow the undeveloped
man beneath a tearless moon.

Interred in his ears is a loud cry
that mocks the man's independence.
His palsied brain entreats entry
into the seams of trees; beseeches
to own a gullet of water, avian speech.

Now his flesh of flame flourishes,
symmetrical sounds obeying rules
his liberated spirit has identified
and forged this anthem. Approve
of his song, the woman will then
leave for those who choose to remain
to commemorate and bear in mind.

The Nocturne Crucible

I possess a nocturne crucible
colonised with boiling waves
of artifices and prophecies and
tail ends of muses, cast off in
shady, unfettered distant past,
twilight guided in a semi-
night piece of aged kindled days.
        Matter-of-factly a medley
of memories stained together,
fostering a menacing monologue;
pin-pierced and anatomized.
        A reanimated me.
        It is a prime location
to venture to when one's been
trampled on and knocked around—
        a quiet asylum,
benevolent to brutal bygones.
In praise of the dead, dauntlessly
it amasses seas of fits, of temper tears,
tossed in my paler demises.
There, heated up by the immediacy
of times gone by, I am guarded from
harm, realising I'm, in every respect,
without any ties, alone forevermore,

folded in with my coven comrades:
the fractured, fatigued army figurine,
the ’67 Hot Wheels Mustang,
greened by patina, plus the early
snow during salad days and those
bloody blue moon cycles
over and over again.

Madrigal

Azaleas are all gone,
autumn is arriving,
fragmenting
into shadowy arras.
What coppice recollects
her cries, her earlier
exhilarations.

That liturgy of leaves
and the trees' vital fluids
are extracted by the Sun;
cease in this secondary,
sedated brassy form.
The coolness of the air
now commands.

If, befouled, I yield
a likeness beyond
this current descended
cornucopia,
I ask myself, "Hey, you sap—
why all this rumination,
and why so long-drawn-out;

Or why not enough said
for facility or mettle—
the Days in the Sun,
have barely begun,

And those azaleas,
a scarce insufficient,
are singled out,
the remaining few
fallen and withered?”

CONTRIBUTORS

Carrie Lee Connel (she/her) lives in Southwestern Ontario as a Treaty Land inhabitant, with her husband, the poet Andreas Gripp. She is an alumna of Western University with an MLIS and a BA in English Language & Literature. Her poems have been included in the anthologies *Stones Beneath the Surface*, *Moon Shine: A Canadian Poetry Collection*, *Another London*, *Piping At The End Of Days*, and *Smitten: This is What Love Looks Like*. Carrie has published three books of poetry, including *Written In Situ* (Harmonia Press, 2020). She currently devotes half her time to writing poetry and fiction, and the other half to pursuing artistic interests, including watercolour painting and fabric arts.

James Deahl was born in Pittsburgh in 1945; he moved to Canada in 1970, and is the author or editor of over thirty books, his four most recent titles being: *Four-Square Poems; Awareness; The Confederation Poets: The Founding Of A Canadian Poetry 1880 To The First World War;* and *Earth's Signature*. He is the editor of *Tamaracks: Canadian poetry for the 21st century; In A Springtime Instant: The Selected Poems of Milton Acorn 1950–1986;* and *Adder's-tongues: A Choice of Norma West Linder's Poems 1969 – 2011. To Possess The Land: An Anthology of Confederation Poetry*, the companion volume to *The Confederation Poets*, will be published later this year. A cycle of his poems is the focus of the American television documentary *Under the Watchful Eye*. Deahl is the father of three daughters: Sarah, Simone, and Shona, and the grandfather of Scot and Felix. He lives in Sarnia, Ontario.

Enno de Witt's poetry and artwork are firmly rooted in a tradition that goes all the way back to the dawn of language and to his youth on the Dutch North Sea coast. De Witt lives in the medieval city of Deventer on the banks of the river IJssel in The Netherlands. His poetry and art are published in The Netherlands, the USA, the UK, Nigeria, and India.

Brian Duran-Fuentes was born and raised in Mexico City. He is a Medical Interpreter at a Hospital in Dallas, Texas. His work has appeared in several publications including *Oyez Review, Ravens Quoth Press, Thimble Magazine,* and *Voicemail Poems.* He was a contributor for the now-extinct vaporwave magazine *Private Suite.*

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *New World Writing, City Brink* and *Tenth Muse.* Latest books: *Subject Matters, Between Two Fires* and *Covert* are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Hawaii Pacific Review, Amazing Stories* and *Cantos.*

Mary Anne Griffiths (she/her) is a poet and fiction writer living in Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada. She shares space with a husband, a tortie and tuxie.

Andreas Gripp was born and raised in Treaty 6 Territory (London, Ontario) and in 2024 relocated to Leamington with his wife, Carrie. He's the author of over 30 books of verse, including *Clocking the Equus: Poems Selected and New* (2025). His poetry is inspired by the contemporary experiences of both common and uncommon people. The poems in this issue are from a manuscript-in-progress.

Gregory Wm. Gunn was born in 1960 in Windsor. His formative years were spent in a few small towns before finally settling in London, Ontario in 1970. Involved in the arts from a young age, then specialising in music and writing during his scholastic time at Fanshawe College in the early 80s, he has been striving industriously, honing his skills in both those disciplines ever since. He has been widely published in a number of literary journals including *The Toronto Quarterly, Side B Magazine, Inscribed Magazine, Burning Wood, 20 X 20 Magazine, Crack the Spine, Covalence, Blue Lake Review, The Light Ekphrastic,* and many others. He is currently compiling his 13th volume of poems.

Delighting in multimedia, poet and playwright **Penn Kemp** is active across the web. Her collection, INCREMENTALLY, is up as an e-book and album on hempressbooks.com/authors/penn-kemp. Please see https://seaofpo.vispo.com?p=pk for the animation. Updates are on pennkemp.weebly.com pennkemp.wordpress.com and pennkemp.substack.com

Richard Oyama's poems, stories and essays have appeared in *Premonitions: The Kaya Anthology of New Asian North American Poetry, The Nuyorasian Anthology, Breaking Silence, Dissident Song, A Gift of Tongues, About Place, Konch Magazine, Pirene's Fountain, Tribes, Malpais Review, Anak Sastra, Buddhist Poetry Review* and other literary journals. *The Country They Know* (Neuma Books, 2005) is his first collection of poetry. He has a M.A. in English: Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Currently retired, Oyama taught at California College of Arts in Oakland, University of California at Berkeley, and University of New Mexico.

Donna Pucciani, a Chicago-based writer, has published poetry world-wide in *Shi Chao Poetry, Poetry Salzburg, Li Poetry, Acumen, Gradiva, Meniscus* and other journals. Her seventh and latest book of poetry is EDGES.

Richard-Yves Sitoski is a songwriter and performance poet, and was the 2019-2023 Poet Laureate of Owen Sound, on the territory of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation. His poems and reviews have appeared in *Arc*, *The Fiddlehead*, *PRISM*, *Prairie Fire*, *Train*, *CAROUSEL*, and elsewhere. He is co-editor, with Penn Kemp, of *Poems in Response to Peril: An Anthology in Support of Ukraine,* profits from which went to displaced Ukrainian cultural workers. His one-person fringe show, *Butterfly Tongue*, has played to sold-out houses. He is a 2021 Best of the Net nominee, the recipient of the 2021 John Newlove Award, and the second-place winner of the 2022 Don Gutteridge Award. His most recent works are the

chapbook *How to Be Human* and the full-length poetry collection *Wait, What?* His collection *A Current Through the Flesh* is forthcoming from Ronsdale Press.

Melissa Thorne (she/her) lives in Cobourg, Ontario, with her husband, two young sons and Irish Wolfhound, Walter. She reluctantly serves as Walter's social media manager after he inadvertently went "viral." Melissa is an associate member of the League of Canadian Poets with work published in the *South Shore Review* and the *Hills Spirit V* anthology.

Jennifer Wenn is a trans-identified writer and speaker from London, Ontario. Her first poetry chapbook, *A Song of Milestones*, was published by Harmonia Press. Her first full-size collection, *Hear Through the Silence*, was published by Cyberwit. Coming Spring 2025 from Wet Ink Books is her second collection, *Emergence*. She has also written *From Adversity to Accomplishment* (a family and social history), published poetry in numerous journals and anthologies, and is the proud parent of two adult children. Visit her at jenniferwennpoet.wixsite.com/home

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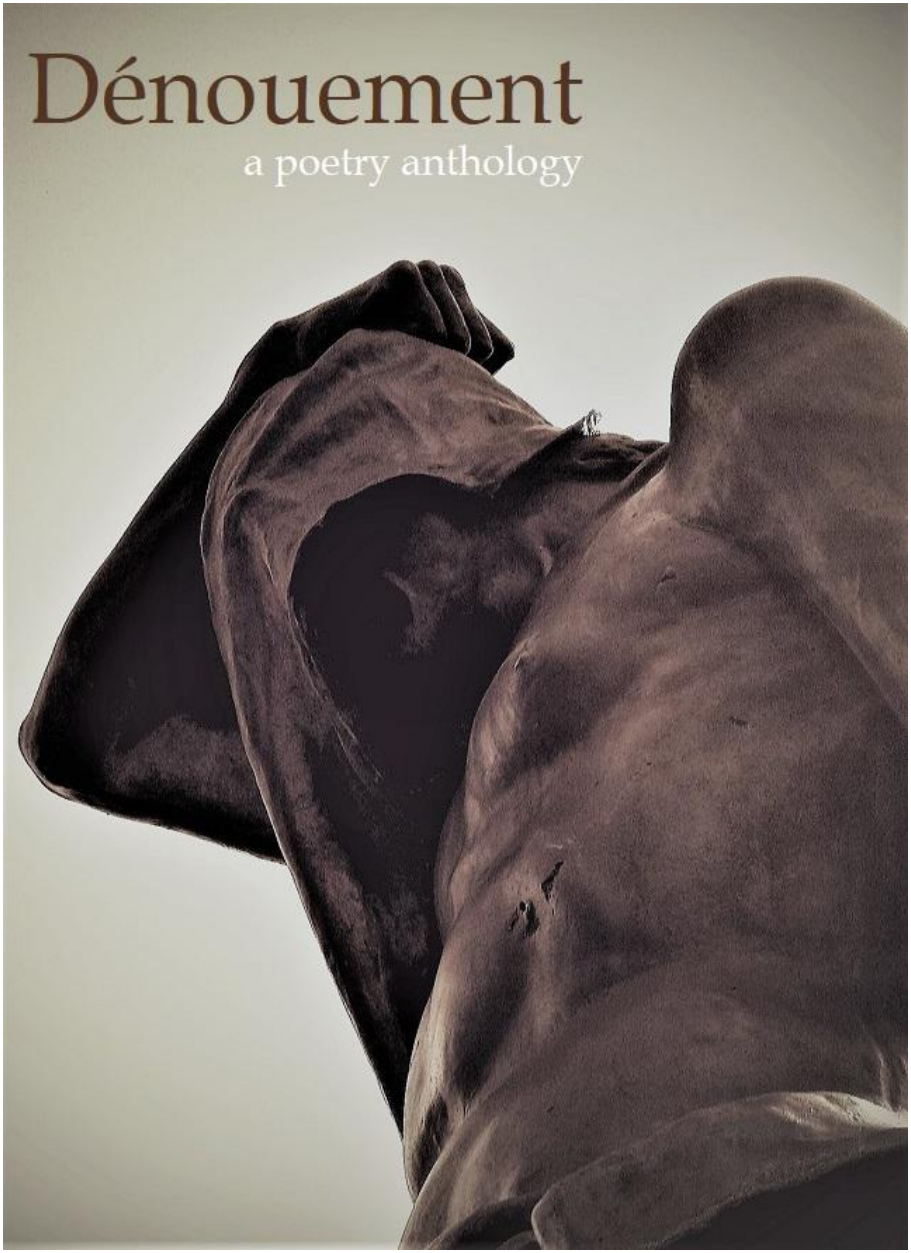

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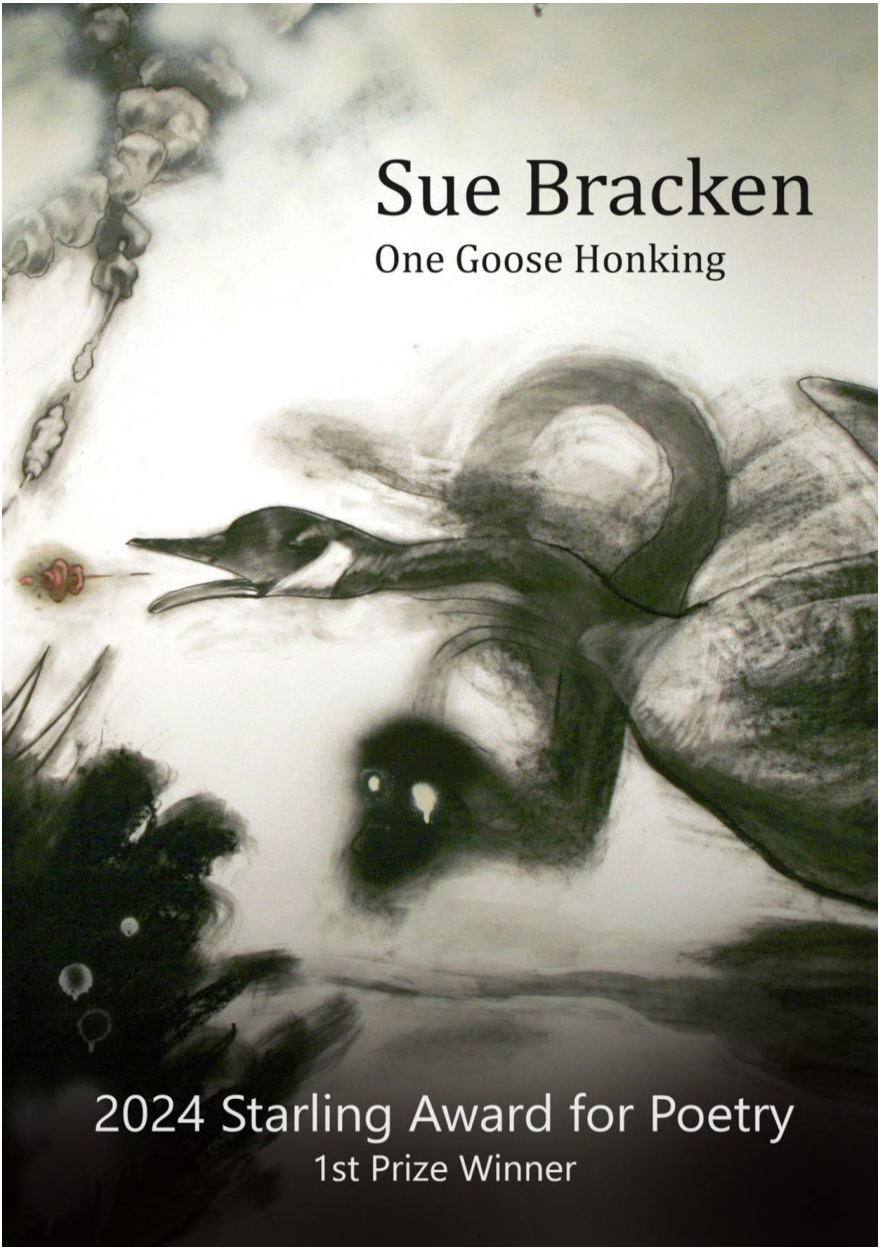

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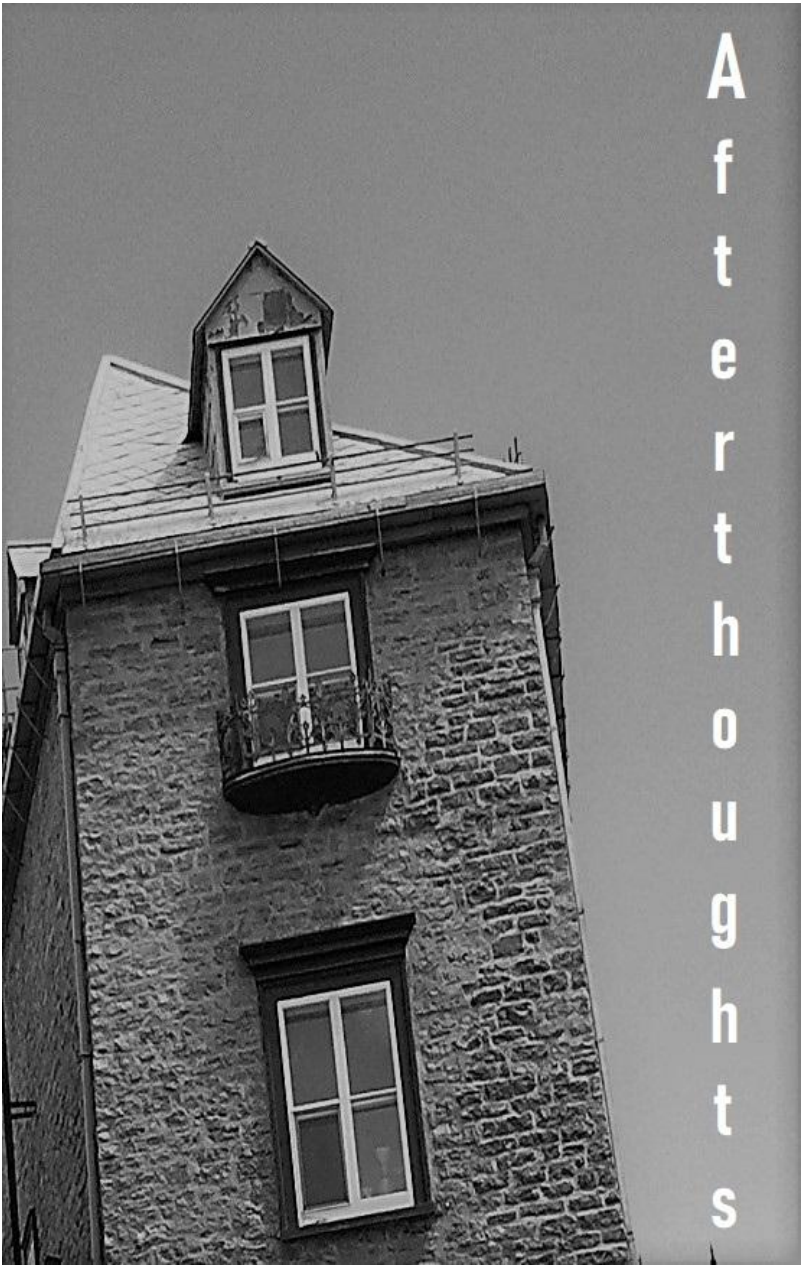

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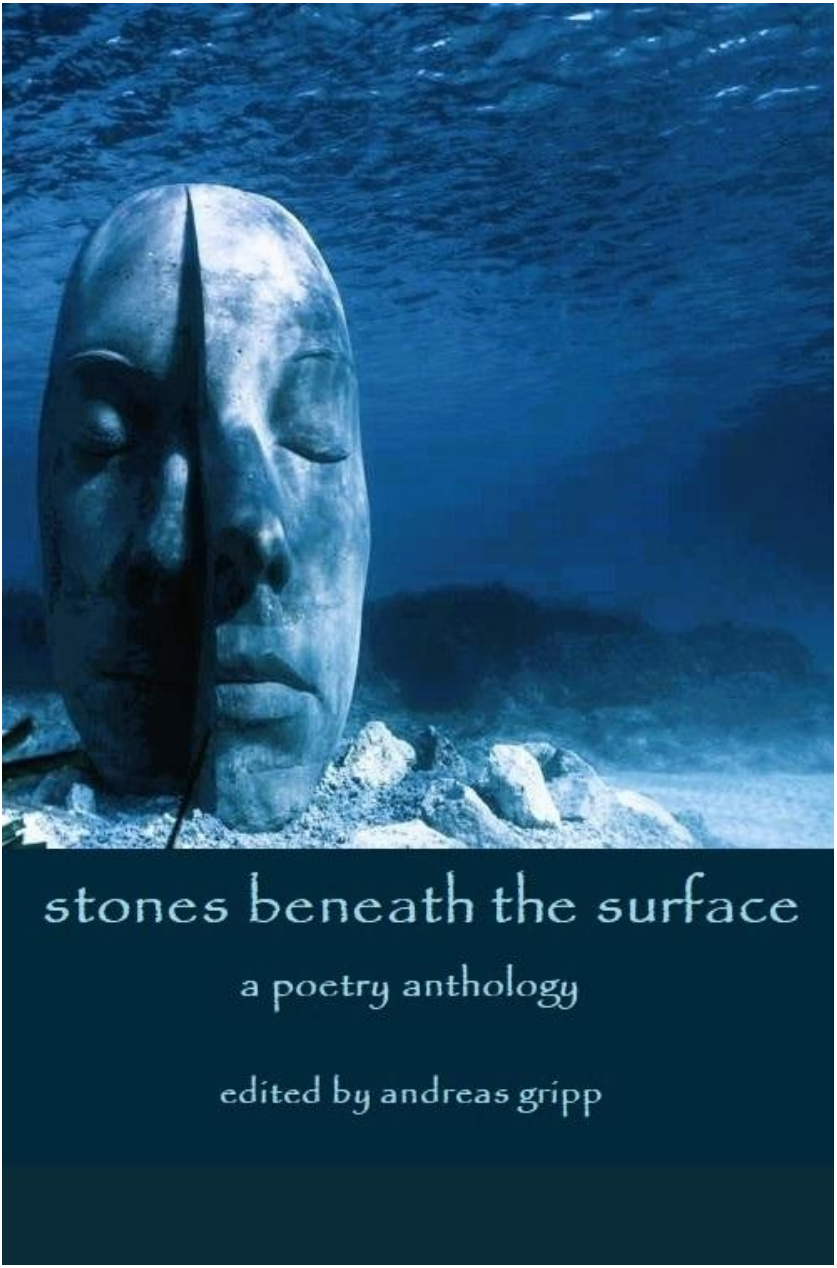

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ISSN 2371-6940

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Brian Duran-Fuentes
John Grey
Mary Anne Griffiths
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